DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 402 SO 024 889

AUTHOR Leidman, Mary Beth
TITLE Imaging and Political Packaging.
PUB DATE May 90
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Nation's Capital Chapter of the Hunter College Alumni Association (Washington, DC, May 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; Audience Analysis; *Audience Response; Audiences; Demography; Higher Education; Mass Instruction; Persuasive Discourse; *Political Campaigns; *Public Opinion; Qualitative Research; *Radio; *Salesmanship; Social Science Research

ABSTRACT

This document looks at advertising and political commercials in radio. When placing an advertisement, in any media in general and radio in particular, one takes into consideration qualitative and quantitative data: how many people are listening, and who they are, and what level of education they have attained. Listeners have extremely well established and hard to break listening habits. Advertising of any sort is an image creating phenomenon in which a need for a product is created. This takes place through a process of needs assessments and design of message and placement within the media. If one spans the radio dial during an election campaign, one will find candidates and their handlers specifically tailoring a message to particular audiences that reflects the needs of that audience's demographic characteristics (education, income, marital status, ethnicity). Creating political images is comparable to selling any product: create a need for and the desire to purchase the product. There are two avenues that may be followed in creating the perfect advertising spot: (1) rational appeals; and (2) emotional appeals. Safety, performance, appearance, comfort, economy, and durability are considered to be rational appeals, while human interest, comedy, conflict, uniqueness, prominence, sensuality, and sex are the emotional appeals. There is very little of the rational approach in creating a political image. In the final analysis, the selling of a candidate is not unlike the selling of a luxury item. The item is invented, the audience identified, the selling strategy designed, the individual spots tailored to fit the characteristics of a particular audience, and the advertisement placed where it will be the most effective. (DK)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

IMAGING AND POLITICAL PACKAGING

ED 380 402

Mary Beth Leidman, Ed. D.
Department of Communications Media
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
MARY BETH LEIDMAN

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented to Hunter College Alumni Association
Nation Capital Chapter
Washington, D.C.
May, 1990

SO 024 889

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IMAGING AND POLITICAL PACKAGING
Mary Beth Leidman, Ed. D.

Thank you very much for that gracious introduction. I'm going to keep my remark relatively short to allow time at the end for what I hope will be a lively discussion. It is really a pleasure to be here with representatives of Hunter College.

Today I would like to speak to you about political imagery. It is an area which holds endless fascination to the most casual observer of the world scene. It's fabulously interesting and colorful. And for us it's the only game in town, except for the Redskins.

Since coming of age in the 1960 Presidential election, politics and the electronic media have been inseparable partners in the democratic process. This has never been as true as it is in the present climate where the gloves have been pulled off and Willie Nelson became a major media figure. When make-up, working and the media replace the message, then the game has entered extra innings and the rules have irrevocably changed.

Politics has become a narrowcasting media in which audiences are identified vis a vis demographic characteristics. It means there must be a methodology available in order to reach each individual the same way that audience identification takes place in radio. The other major puzzle deals with exactly how commercials are developed and applied to the political scene.

Advertising of any sort is an image creating phenomenon in which a need for a product is created. This takes place through a process of needs assessments and design of message and placement within the media.

Effectiveness in placing advertisements and creating the most bang for the buck is a function of frequency and reach. How often is a particular spot aired and how many people are being reached by the particular ad. This is measured in gross ratings points. In radio, the station rule of thumb is that every spot must be aired at least 1.8 times to attain any measurable impact whatsoever.

With that said, let us take a moment and examine in a bit more detail radio as a particular media. When placing an ad, in any media in general and radio in particular, one takes into consideration qualitative and quantitative data. In other words, how many people are listening and who are these people. Listeners have extremely well established and hard to break listening habits.

The average adult listener tunes into two, possibly three radio stations--that is all. For instance, I would venture a guess that this particular group most likely listens to all things considered on WETA or another NPR station; WGMS the classical music station and WGAY. WGMS has the highest and strongest qualitative profile of any station in Washington and WGAY is the number one station form the viewpoint of sheer listeners.

Qualitatively, there is a lot of education and money in this room and, demographically speaking, the age group is older than 34. Given Washington's generally growing older population and the information I mentioned before about WGAY and WGMS, this makes both stations excellent choices for advertisements of a specific variety to reach this particular group. The qualitative research takes on almost a big brother quality with a book called Scarborough. The Scarborough Report could tell you how many women aged 54 spend $100 per month at Bloomingdale's.

Politically speaking, one would find spots concentrating on Social Security Benefits on these stations where child care spots might find a home on at WLTE, which features a younger, affluent and educated listening public. During an election campaign, I suggest you span the dial, you will find candidates and their handlers specifically

tailoring a message to those audiences. Across the country, out of the listening and viewing area, one would not be surprised to see Gephardt in the fields, Barbara Bush on a horse, or Mike Dukakis in a tank. Each reflects the specific needs of the audience hoping for the big pay off of a vote.

The other major element in the whole scenario of creating political images also returns us to the basics of how one sells a product, any product, be it baby shampoo, opera tickets, lawn fertilizer or political candidates. It is, in essence, all the same thing.

Generally speaking, as I said before and as most of you already know, the way to sell a product involves creating a need for the product and then the desire to purchase the product. Say, for instance, we have a product and have identified the audience which we think would be inclined towards the possession of that product. How exactly do we proceed?

In general, there are two avenues that we can take in creating the perfect spot. Let us assume that your product has some real recognizable value. There are two different ways to approach the packaging of a product. These are called the rational appeals and the emotional appeals.

Safety, performance, appearance, comfort, economy, and durability are considered to be rational appeals, while human interest, comedy, conflict, uniqueness, prominence, sensuality and sex are the emotional appeals. Now, just for argument's sake, let us assume that all of you are political packages, which appeal will sell your candidate?

That's right. There is very little of the rational approach in creating a political image. There was nothing rational about the packaging of Ronald Reagan, for instance. That President was sold on human interest, uniqueness, prominence and sensation. In other words, charisma!

In the last political election, very much the same approach worked for President Bush; give them me, but do not tell them my content. Tell them the content of the other guy. Dukakis, on the other hand, operated on a much more rational level trying to sell the rational appeal on performance, economy and durability. He tried to sell the fact that he was the maker of the Massachusetts economic miracle.

Now before anyone jumps, I will admit that both candidates, or any candidate al all, tries to sneak in some of their real background and plans into a campaign but in the final analysis, we vote on emotions first and reality

second. We join a bandwagon because we do not want to be left out, and the crowd behavior of joining is also an emotional response to a situation.

In the past Presidential election, Dukakis ran a stupid campaign by not trying to respond to the attacks upon him, his strategy of spoofing the republicans was confusing. Where as Bush was pure emotion, perfectly targeted at different age groups in different locales. The results are history.

I contend that it is possible to sit down with any of the more successful campaign advertisements and analyze them scene by scene. In almost all cases, it is possible to identify a particular emotional appeal scene by scene. This is how the spots were designed and the desired results of the vote were the result.

Although we have always voted with our emotions, the situation has become worse. There is consent is election image building hidden beneath the surface but it is the emotional response which makes or breaks a candidate. Please take note of the fact that I never mentioned the word "intelligence" in regards to the electorate. Well, that unfortunately is the situation. Respect for the intelligence of the voter takes a back seat to everything in the mass media.

In the final analysis, the selling of a candidate is not unlike the selling of a luxury item. We invent the item, identify the audience, design the selling strategy, tailor the individual spots for a particular audience and place the advertisement in the place where it is going to create the most bang for the buck.

This is building methodology for political candidates today and this is, unfortunately for the Democrats, but fortunately for the Republicans, the situation with which we will live with for the foreseeable future.